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SUBJECT: ARMENIA: OSCE POST-ELECTION WORKING GROUP MEETING

**¶1.** (SBU) On March 3, 2008 embassy officers attended the first OSCE Post-Election Working Group (PEWG) meeting hosted by OSCE Deputy Head of Mission Mark Bojanic. Present were representatives of the European Commission, several diplomatic missions, and a number of NGOs and civil society groups. No representatives from the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM) attended. Bojanic opened the floor with a request for comments as to how the international community in partnership with NGOs could forge ahead with a common strategy to alleviate the current political impasse between the Armenian government and opposition forces supporting former President Levon Ter-Petrossian.

**¶2.** (SBU) Most of the working group participants expressed dissatisfaction with the overall performance of ODIHR's EOM and in particular with ODIHR's preliminary election statement February 20. (NOTE: Technically, this was the statement of the combined International Election Observation Mission -- ODIHR, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the European Parliament -- but this subtlety was lost on the working group, as indeed it has been lost on the Armenian public. END NOTE). The primary point of contention was the report's use of the words "mostly in line" to describe Armenia's adherence to democratic election standards. Many of the participants also pointed out that issuing a report that relegated serious election concerns to the end of the report sent the wrong message to the Armenian government and perhaps undermined international efforts to promote democracy in the country. As evidence of this, one participant pointed out that the Armenian government had for the first time publicly embraced the ODIHR report instead of the usually more positive CIS observer mission report issued in past elections.

**¶3.** (SBU) In response, Bojanic acknowledged that the language used in the ODIHR report was perhaps more diplomatic than necessary. He also pointed out, however, he also pointed out that it reflected the legitimate observations of election observers present at the time. In addition, Bojanic cited the difficulty of composing a joint (PACE/OSCE PA/European Parliament/ODIHR) press statement with such little turnaround time as a reason for the somewhat ambiguous, flat presentation to the press. Bojanic and other OSCE representatives noted that the report and subsequent press statement were a result of the consensus opinion of the OSCE member countries, some of whom would not like to see ODIHR involved in election observing at all. (NOTE: We have indications privately from the ODIHR EOM that they had pushed for the statement to read "partly in line" with standards, but the parliamentary delegations pushed for the more positive "mostly in line" statement. END NOTE).

¶4. (SBU) Participants were concerned that the current state of emergency could turn into a witch-hunt, in which President Kocharian and Prime Minister Sargsian would arrest their political opponent. On the issue of a common post-election strategy, general consensus was reached on the need to apply pressure on the government to reestablish freedom of press and respect for human rights. General agreement was also expressed on urging the Armenian government to fully investigate all reports of violence and excessive use of force, including full disclosure of the alleged discovery of a weapons cache at Opera Square on the morning of March 1.

PENNINGTON